

PARNASSUS



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PARNASSUS

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HOW HIGH THE PRICE?

by Edward Mitchell

The blood flowed down his cheek and onto the uniform where the fresh bright hue combined with the dried beef stains to monopolize the top of his white coveralls. He was obviously stunned and before any of us could reach him, he took an aimless step forward, stumbled over the side of beef which had fallen from the conveyor some three feet above his head, and fell heavily to the cement floor. The metal hook, used to hold the beef on the conveyor, had jumped its track and struck him on the way down.

"Quick, someone get a wet rag and first aid kit."

"Duke, hey Duke, Jim's hurt pretty bad."

"Where in the hell is that first aid kit!" "Did anyone call the ambulance yet?"

"You think we'll need one?"

"God damn right we'll need one, he's unconscious and I can't stop the bleeding."

"Duke, where in the hell is Duke?"

"I'll call the ambulance and find Duke," I shouted loud enough from the office doorway to be heard over the din. I gave the ambulance attendant the address and some quick info about what had happened. Then I began looking for Duke.

My brother had warned me that the Stug Beef Company, a small meat cutting house, which supplies beef to the local grocers, was a salt mine. The money was good though and I needed the money. After all, my employment was only for the summer and I would cope with the conditions.

I was now in my third week. The workload was strenuous, but not unbearable. Duke was the head foreman and had complete control of work operations, answerable only

to the owner. He had been with the cutting house for twenty-five years, although he was still in his early forties. Failing to complete his eighth year of education, he found employment at Stug's and worked his way up to the position he now enjoyed. His emotions seemed exceedingly cold, befitting the regimental air he assumed while handing out the daily work schedules. His tolerance of others paralleled that of his subordinates.

I found Duke still in the meat car where he had been prior to the accident.

"Hey Duke, Jim got hit with a meathook, he's bleeding pretty bad. Didn't you hear them calling?"

"Yeah, I heard."

"Well don't you think you better take a look."

"I think I better finish logging in these sides of beef."

"What's more important, this meat or Jim?"

There was a marked pause, then Duke turned to face me for the first time since I had entered the car. The skin around his eyes tightened, then relaxed.

"They're about the same."

The siren ended our discussion as the ambulance pulled into the yard. Duke went out to watch as Jim's body was carried past on a stretcher. A bloody wet rag had replaced his facial features from the mouth up.

I walked into the office and punched my time card, 10:36. I had hoped to last three months; instead it was less than three weeks. My brother was right, Stug's was a salt mine. As I slumped into my car I thought such a place should be left to men like Sinclair — and Duke. The price of beef was too damn high anyway.

THE QUIXILIAN STORY

by Nick Noyes

“This planet appears deserted,” said the Quixilian leader, scanning the ground below. The Quixilian race is of a humanoid type and completely carnivorous by nature. After many years on their home planet, their food supply is exhausted. Now they travel the universe in search of meat, particularly human meat.

It is the year 2083, and the planet Earth has developed a method of instant planet to planet travel. It is possible to transfer the entire population of Earth to another planet in a matter of days, if need be, because of the simplicity of the system as well as the comparatively low population of the planet. Earth's total population, through famine, war, and wage-and-price controls has dwindled to scarcely one-tenth of its size a century before.

Several weeks earlier, Earth had received a vital communication from the planet Bertan-3, the only other planet known to be inhabited with life comparable to Earth's. The communication stated that the Bertans were under attack by the Quixilians and had no chance for survival. Earth was warned to begin evacuation procedures immediately as the Quixils were known to be planning an Earth invasion. When the Quixilians landed they found not one human in sight. The Quixilian leader immediately ordered the capture of all animals and the plundering of buildings for food.

For more than a century prior to the invasion Earth had been using the practice of cryrogeny, which in layman's terms is the freezing of dead bodies for future reviving when a method of restoring life is discovered. Because of the suddenness with which Earth was deserted, no frozen bodies were brought to the new home. The bodies were housed in huge buildings in transparent cases for observation.

It was not long before the plundering Quixils had stumbled upon one of the buildings. Opening the door, the Quixilian leader gasped with joy and incredulity.

“Oh WOW, popsicles!”

THE PARTY

by John Johnson

A cold parking lot. I mean evening. It is a cold evening for standing in a parking lot.

Going to a cocktail party. Thinking of another party. An 8th grade outing really. At a lake. With a brook. Everyone in the lake but me, who's intensely involved with the frogs at the brook and hoping ardently that everyone believes I am intensely involved with the frogs in the brook. "What are you doing?" "I'm trying to find a girl frog so that if I kiss it, I'll get what I want."

"Ain't that cute, me Hearty, but what were you really thinking?"

"I was wishing that the baseball game would start. Hated that loose stuff about going for a swim and mixing it up with the kids. A whole lake. Give me the bases and the pitchers and the batter and knowing when you're supposed to get excited and where Home plate is. But a damned lake full of people pushing and laughing and ignoring."

And now a cocktail party all the people talking and laughing and ignoring. May it go well. Spontaneity may be one of my less prominent traits but perhaps sociability will get me through.

Now what have I done. What kind of pessimism is this. The man with the wayward son looks sadly at me, moving away.

"Because I have to. The instructors collecting the finals this evening. But of course I wouldn't be in this position if I didn't want to be. It's perhaps giving a bit more tension than I expected, but that's to be expected. Nothing's as easy as the plan. And the plan is for sociability. Perhaps a bit of grinding against the rest out there will make us all a bit more smooth and graceful. Wear you and you're presumptions right out of my system. Simple as that."

"Perhaps me Hearty it's simple as that. Perhaps you'll get an ulcer before they arrive too."

"Shut-up. I think this is the car."

Sure enough. Here goes. Hand grips the handle, face smiling at the smiling face behind the glass. Remember, don't stand up as the roller-coaster goes up the hill. Keep your hands on the bar. Let's see who can keep their eyes open. Who can keep. . . Is it worse going up or worse going down? Up, I'm sure it's worse going up. Click, click, click the chair pulling up, pulling a train holding a chain of people.

Chimph, soft chimph, goes the door as it closes.

"Hi, Mrs. Randall."

"Hi John, this is my husband Rick."

"Hi Rick."

"Hello John."

Little handshake over the seat before we begin. A sturdy jawed burly pipe-smoker, real strapping handsome guy this Rick.

Of the last sturdy fellow I met. A farmer, sturdy hands on hips. "So you want the job. Never picked apples before hey."

My hands go to my hips, his stance suddenly adopted by me. The poor farmer is staring in a mirror, a fun-house mirror. Nevertheless I was hired.

May I not stick my chin out, may I not adopt a burly voice, may I please sit back and enjoy the aroma of the pipe."

"Do you know how to get to the house Mrs. R.," says I. "Well we have a map but we're not quite sure of course."

Good, good, good. We shall sit comfortably back and enjoy a search, all busily occupied with street signs and counting houses and making sure which is the fork and which is the road. The smell of the pipe, a warm car, a simple game, quiet people. So far so good, easy beginning. Pulling up over one dark hill after another, a few trees, brittle branched, meadows stretching off into moonlight half-wishing to ride forever.

"The womb me Hearty the womb, you're still a blinking baby."

"I don't think babies blink in the womb. I also have no doubt that it was comfortable. And I also know that's there's nothing, including that, that I want to do over. Furthermore, I'd enjoy this if I never spent a single night in somebody's womb."

But now the house has pulled up.

Getting out of the car very slowly, when nearly out pretending to have forgotten something and poking my head back in. *"The womb me Hearty, the womb."*

Sploosh. Out and toward the door.

A path of people all arriving at once, a bit late. Is that a clue? Feel a bit more a part of things: unity in apprehension is after all unity. Levelled, lowered, or raised, who knows, but we're together. Into the house, into the light. Dracula melts in the light and my hands feel a bit moist. *"And I bet you wish you were in your casket (or womb?) me Hearty har har."*

Handing professors coat. Mistake, mistake. He wants the paper not the coat. Suavely withdraw coat as if I didn't really mean it, drop paper on floor in midst of suavity and finally make delivery to the prof. Walk to bedroom with coat place on bed, neatly very neatly. In fact that arm should be like this and this one like that. Play around a bit more till someone else comes and games up. Out once more to the light.

Into the parlor. A solitary dancer, dressed in pink from head to toe, arms raised and curling above the head, a slow Russian dance revolving her about the room. The prof's child all of her tiny self not at all ill at ease, positively rapturous amidst this sudden crowd of walking trees. And papa quite happy with her too.

Somewhere deep down I know there is rapture in all of us too. "*Ba ba ba boo. Just try being serious about this me Hearty just try.*" I know I'm tickled pink to be here "*tickled out of your senses at least me Hearty.*"

Off to the cellar to begin the party in earnest. Pairing off, filtering, and me ending up near the eats "*I'm good for your appetite hey me Hearty.*"

"Hi John did I see you running down route 103 one night" said a hungry former classmate.

"Yep. I jog a bit." bashfully boastfully.

"Me too" Another hard-driver.

"You two jog? I do too." Night school people who hang around buffet tables at cocktail parties are all joggers and quite happy to talk about jogging. A merry little group we were.

"What are you folks all wrapped in" says the prof.

"Jogging. We're all joggers" we three smile.

"Oh Jesus" prof walks off mocking alarm lest he catch whatever infects us.

"Oh well light and jolly, in a light and jolly bubble of sound, I'll float through the party in this little bubble. Well not so bad. Expecting the worst one can accept anything maybe. Not the most enlightening philosophy I must say, kind of sickening in fact docility pretending to be stoicism.

But here, what's this suspicious fellow Sidling up on the right. Back to the wall, very unobtrusive about to make a connection in a dark alley for a black deed with a shady character.

"My wife told me about you" he says.

"She did?" My turn for the mock alarm. Watched too many bad television comedies in my formative years is the excuse most handy. "What?"

"I have a son who's a little out of line and I don't know what to say to him. He won't listen." Says he.

"Hm. I have a brother, same thing. Lecture him I do. End up hating myself. Make things I know are good seem bad." Establishing a common ground, a rather discouraging landscape I've chosen I dare say. Unity in futility.

"But what about you. You're in school and my wife says you seem to enjoy it. What's your method or goals?"

Little prevarication called for here methinks, whilst I construct a history that develops logically into a present and assures a rosy future, and that is also suitably interesting, purposely, virtuous, vaguely truthful, easily explainable and enticing. How the brain does go.

"Ahh" first words off the line. "Form I think. Scatterbrained when I left school a few years ago. Didn't believe. ."

"Ah belief, that's it you have to have belief in yourself."

"Yah well if you don't overdo it. I've believed in myself so much sometimes that I was content to do nothing. The whole world seemed pure frippery, philosophical disguise for lack of hope of course." "*I'm back because the world seems now a frappe, hey me Hearty, instead of a frip.*"

"What did you do while you were out."

"Music, learned a little of that. Odd jobs, read a lot sometimes. But about your son and why I went back." Because I failed outside now seeking the bosom of tradition, thinking I've discovered the trick of pleasing her. That's always an illusion. It's never discovered, just earned, learned. Course then it will seem a trick, but still how hard it was. And this talk perhaps that's why I'm back? "*You're an angel me Hearty.*"

"You were misunderstood the first time." This guy's hot ideas about why people do things. A prior reasoning, a regular no no in these relative times. No instincts, intuitions, I must show him he's wrong.

"There was nothing to misunderstand. I didn't say much or do much." Nice romantic thought it was too, the misunderstood rebel. I'm not adverse to playing that part I'm afraid, though, even if I know I'm grossly miscast.

"But now you believe in yourself and you're doing well."

"Well it seems I'm doing O.K. sometimes."

It's people like you who don't fit the forms who will end up making the new forms. I've said enough. I'll let you go now."

"Oh. O.K. It was good to talk to you. Thank you." Jesus. Wet my eyes even. Pack a shirt. Me? New forms. Hope I need the old ones. Found that out if anything over the years.

Then again need for tears too. Wrong in his analysis but

right in his gifts. He's happy and I'm not hurt. *"No me Hearty? Some old fuddy-duddy who seeds these romantic creations, these debilitating perversions, in the form, soothing form, of well-wishing. This guy knocks you off your feet. Ah me Hearty too much."* "Look he just wanted to touch me and encourage me and perhaps feel a little of the warmth of his own kindness. It's not the ideas, its the gesture."

Now the argument withers (although the glow remains) in the sudden presence of the striking lady of the party. Full of that simple elegance, expensive no doubt, that one can only hold in disdain; while it holds me in its grip.

My beamers lighting on her all evening, unconsciously picking out her husband observing my beamers. Quite consciously staring everywhere but in her direction after that. Now she's speaking right at me.

"That class was very interesting, no exciting for me. I had been away from school for awhile, a good group of years, and so I thought I'd be out of it. But I felt very much a part of our discussions." Light skin showing those fetching blue veins, light shimmering pools of darkness beneath the eyes. I stare and stare. A Nordic beauty.

"I was away for awhile too. I was afraid I'd have not a word to speak myself. And the prof knew an awful lot. But he didn't lower the boom too much. We all, most of us, got our licks in and learned." I said.

"Yes, he was a good teacher. I'm glad to hear you enjoyed the class too. I thought you looked on us as a bunch of old ladies."

Oh no my fair-haired Viking lass. Gads how I'm going over her face. My eyes skiing over the snow-white downy facial hair, over the smooth-boned facial contours from high-boned cheek to chin. *"Ha ha me Hearty the charm, she's flicked it on and oh how you've gone for it."*

Words from another area. Called away. Sorry to call you away. Can't remember what went on there. Still blinking in the Nordic light.

Much later. Catching a piece of conversation. "It's the mind that sets us free."

"I don't know," says I "Scientists work for anybody it seems. You can get brains to defend anything at all."

"No such luck me Hearty. Can't you just picture it. And I know your picturing it, in dark tones, never minding your inexperience, all those books, those cock-tales. Why is it, tell me again, that you're going me Hearty."

What are all these clouds, lightning bolts, short circuits. "It's slipping from you me Hearty, it's going black. You're losing em."

Party's dissolving. Wives scooping up coats and husbands.

From the whirl the man with the wayward son draws near.

"Why don't you come up and see us. Visit with our son. Let's be friends." Wife echoes this with a smile.

"Sure I will. Sure." A surprise party this is.

And now the prof.

"Let's get together sometime."

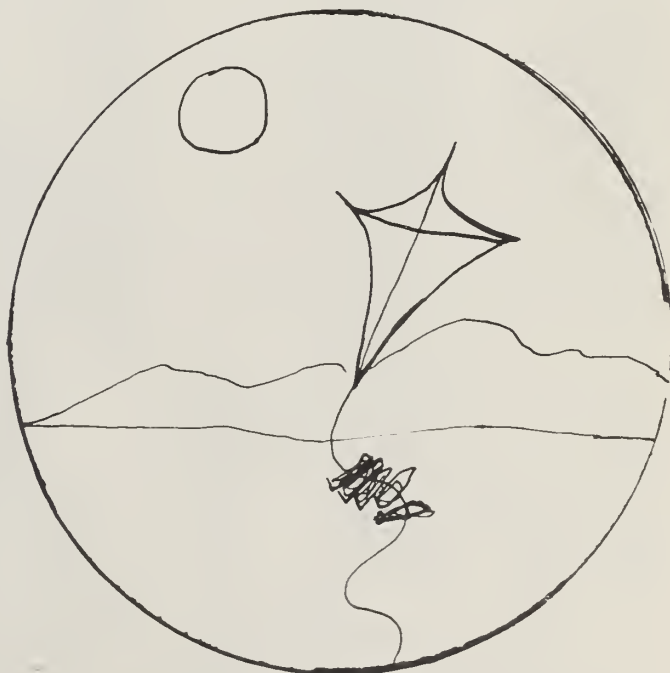
"Yes, I would like that very much." Too polite. Self-satisfaction. Condescension mixed with uneasiness; unpalatable.

"O.K. John." Prof releases me, a little sadly. Yes, it was not the best of endings.

Will we get together. Who knows. But despite all the desire is there and it doesn't die.

Home. Legs not ready for sleep. A walk, to walk, out for a long walk. *"Can I go to me Hearty?"*

"Sure. Just keep it down for awhile that's all."



Drawing by Cynthia O'Neil



Photo by James Pierce

L'ADDITION

by Vera Quinlan

Tonight at work a man came in. He was perhaps in his early fifties, a little less preserved than my own father. He didn't sit on a stool at the counter. He chose a booth.

As I approached him to take his order, he smiled. When I said "Hi!", he jumped upon me with conversation; the weather was awful, he had to wait two hours to get gas, energy crisis, Nixon, and then the almighty question waitresses are asked twenty times a day, "What's good to eat?" He ordered, I delivered.

The unused place setting across from him made his dinner look incomplete. He should by the cycle of life, have been with someone; a son, a daughter, a wife, a friend. Anyone. Our mores have placed an emphasis on pairs. Two, a couple, a set, a match. Bars advertise "single nights," but yet why do singles go there — to get another single, so that perhaps, in the low lights, music, and between Tom Collins' they will be indelibly paired. The desperation is thick. To put an arm around someone, to do anything, but not, God forbid — leave alone — "unscored."

Soup and sandwich, horse and carriage, love and marriage. Vacation weekends, hotel rooms, furniture, all centered around two. If you're single, you're alone. By rights you need someone. We even make up justifications for the single people our society houses. She's an old maid — he's a bachelor. Perhaps this is what made that man sitting there, eating his salisbury steak, strike sympathy in me.

I asked him if he wanted more coffee. His eyes seemed to light up, a smile broke across his face. I made something of him. I fussed. I smiled. I asked him if he enjoyed his dinner. He was overwhelmed. And yet why? Had it been that long a time when someone else would say things like that to him?

He lingered on after his meal and after I had given him his check, so I thought I had done something wrong. I asked him if he was "all set" and as I did, I noticed in his left hand there was a white band on his skin, where his wedding band should've been. I understood. Who was there to go home to?

He paid for his meal with a check and he paid for my kindness with a tip. It was nothing, to wait on him. But he must've thought it a bother. When he asked for dessert, he said, "If you have a minute, I'd like pie."

After he was gone, I went to clear off his table. He had all his dishes stacked up neatly, his soiled napkin in his coffee cup, like he was going to wash them himself.

I washed the table. This time I didn't set it up for two.

L.A.

by R. DiNatale

America must see
the city of dead Angels,
know first hand,
the long highway
that stretches forever through her
immovable plains,
and surges over the cool mountains,
only to jump hot, mad death to
end of continent
tangle of cars and steel.

Swarm the holy hills
the movie lots
the Image
pace the hot boulevards in queer
freedom tennis shoes,
amid armies of boys
sniff out the roots
of their own infectious dreams
kiss the faces
packaged for breakfast,
drive the screaming freeways
into the mad polluted sea.

West-city
Mod-city
Shit-filled-sky-city
In the East, the Sun sets sane, definite,
sliced clean into tiny bits
by the land, but,
The Sun sets over L.A. ocean,
in an ambiguous wavy hiss
causing each day to slip past mysteriously
as they descend
at all hours
like Locust, to the
last of things,
the edge of the continent,
hollering down the
silver chain
of the mad city. Night.

NONSENSE AND OTHER VIRTUES

by James Byrnes

1. *ROMAN IN THE FORUM*

There was a Roman gladiator
in deadly need of a mediator.
His chums
were all thumbs.
He succumbed a bit later.

2. *FOUL OWL STEW*

If all the owls in the world
who live in trees all gnarled
and burl'd;
were stewed in one great owl stew,
I'd have a bowl of owl
or two.

3. *SUBTRACTION*

Leper don't linger
or leave your finger.
Please pick up your ear.
And do you suppose
I need that nose?
I've one of my own right here.

There's your knee.
Don't argue with me.
Hold on to that tongue.
They're hard to borrow
and it's harder to swallow
when your mouth is missing one.

Again I demand:
At once you stand!
(Though I don't trust your hips)
For what I observe
is bad for my nerves.
On the edge of the plate are your lips.

Well he finally left,
with a hop that was deft,
carrying his leg out the door.
And if you think me a louse
for clearing my house
of the wretch just stop, please,
and remember that just as much of him
stayed behind
as had come in before.



Photo by Christine Eppard

SPECIES

Everywhere,
these vertical stumps.

People
who rasp and crinkle
like brown paper bags
when touched.
Talk to them.
During their strain to emit
some functional sound
they raise goose-bumps
on themselves.
They stain themselves
as they finally release
their waste-words.

What? You accuse me of
impropriety to mention these things?
These bad thoughts.
What a miracle you are
so practical.

Now look, here are others.
They hover and flit
feeding on each other.
The wisest are flaccid
and bloated.
Their pores widened;
thousands of sucking mouths
plead humbly, reasonably,
to feed upon you.
Even their hands burp quietly
with encouraging gratitude.
My practical friend,
with a kiss of friendship
they will suck out your teeth.

LYDORA the DEVIL'S BITCH

Not limpid sound
Comes crashing down
When dew doth tumult
From her raving hair;
Lit in blackness
By glacial fire
Aroused to ire
By her spectral love.
O the harpies breath
Will warm her lips,
And ponderous hands
Surround her hips,
And draw her to
Consum'ate doom;
Thru' fright'ning mist
And bright'ning gloom;
Ere' the hungered sun
Appears to dine
And tear night's flesh
Like fatted swine.

VIATICUM

Sunday
blessed
withered priest hands
translucent nails
pink
gather in holy clasp
directing
all
to ask
for the bright death
right there

in the newly waxed mahogany
pews

Slide right in and fall
through
the trap door
to glory.

One candle dims
and dies
is lit again. Clink

by James Byrnes

PIG-A-MIES

by Jared Towler

While walking through the jungle
Stalking a mighty beast
I came upon some pig-a-mies
At their ghastly feast.

Arms and legs and feet and stuff
Were strewn around the ground
And not a word did come from them
No, not a single sound.

I looked at all those pig-a-mies
And they looked back at me
I saw them in the underbrush
I saw them in the trees.

Although they were so little
Their strength in numbers lay
And before I could escape them
They wrapped me all in hay.

They hopped and danced around me
Tying me up with rope
And when they lit a fire up
Away went all my hope.

I pleaded with those pig-a-mies
I begged them to delay
But against all that I prayed for
They ate me yesterday.

APOSTROPHE PERISSODACTYLLY

by James Byrnes

O rhinoceros,
 you're preposterous
 to propose that you
 can fly.

If you could fly,
and I doubt you will,
but if you did
 I would ask you why
a rhinoceros would prefer the sky?

Imagine!
A tumbling herd of barrage balloons!
Hah!
Oh, did I hurt your feelings?
But really, old man, it's quite absurd.
A rhinoceros is not a bird.

A rhinoceros is just too visible.
A rhino isn't small.
 You'd scrape your knees
 on the tallest trees and
 what if you should fall?
Why I'm sure you'd be just miserable
and have no fun at all.

FOR WILLIAM FAULKNER

by R. DiNatale

You set out from your backwoods cabin
 in shirtsleeves
 rubbing bare feet along the earth.
Hearin the wind press the shanties
 to groan their pitiful stale music
 to the trembling moonshine-hot
 liquor night.
In your South full of rivers,
 flatter than steel,
you stretch yourself along the ground
 like a woman
 and know the people,
feel the heart-land's
 slow beatin
 and singin and shufflin,
 rough-cut-Negro-talk
 and shabby-shingled barn blues.
by the blighted cotton fields
 the Negros are asleep
 the seedy white, raging churchtowers,
 groan in heavyness.

SLOW SMILE

by Bob Hamel

It seems as though my feelings
 are something to be played with.
The part of my little world that is
 so fragile, so easily shattered.
It has been tossed, tumbled, and twisted
 into something other than what it is.
This one little part makes all the rest of
 my life seem worth it.
I don't share it, or express it easily, and if
 I do, please understand that what I feel
 is real.
I know too well of how much it
 can hurt.
And just how much you will want to forget,
 when it's over.
But I can't run away from what I feel.
 I have to take a chance.
And hope that a slow smile is
 my answer.

"IT'S TERRIBLE"

by C.L.F.

It's terrible, this world in which I exist.
 I do not live, I never have.
People do not listen when I question
 Yet they scorn when I cry.
It's terrible, this world in which I exist.
 I'm dead, only going through the motions.
Life — I do not know it, I never shall;
 Here I sit buried, yet people do not stop
 to question why
Do they care; oft I wonder.
 It's terrible, this world in which I exist.

FREEDOM

Spreading before him like a maze, the tunnels were long. Long and dark. Shelves of rock hovered above him, slightly higher than his breath.

Hovering close enough to warm but not crush.

Closeness told him to take another tunnel. A tunnel which would lead him to freedom.

Peering to his far left, he found a tunnel which looked promising.

Roots hung from the ceiling, and he thought he spotted sunlight at the far end.

Sunlight guiding him. He began to run; steadily but carefully so not to disturb any loose dirt or rocks. Encouraged by more light, he ran. Faster. Faster.

Approaching the end, his senses told him to be cautious. Be cautious, he thought, it might be a trap.

Slowly, he crept forward. Slowly. Slowly. Slowly. He edged his head out of the tunnel. Only his eyes above ground. He scanned the area. Clover spread before him like a blanket. He jumped out of the tunnel; shook loose the dirt from his little cotton tail. Wiggled his little nose and twitched his long ears.

A pleasant, sweet smell welcomed him. A sweet smell of freedom.

THE STILLNESS

A long gravel road winds its way through miles of flowers, sand dunes and inlets of water stretching its way to the ocean. Cat-o-nine-tails, intermingled with long shimmering grass, nod hello. The stillness around can be touched and embraced, but held only long enough to remember. A subtle caressing breeze brings with it a scent of sweet flowers while butterflies keep pace, stopping here and there to kiss the flowers. Sounds of singing birds and small animals can be heard and occasionally seen. Then a gun shot.

by Buni Gourley

IF ONLY WE HAVE LOVE

by Lila H. Couture

The Universe, the Solar System, the Earth, New Hampshire, Portsmouth — the seaport town. The chill of January seeped through the warmest fur coats. The skies were gray with expectancy of snow. The trees like painted black thorns. Sharp hovering branches protecting the thin, old grey roads.

I had been waiting almost a half a year for the moment she would leave me. This will be the eighth time, only it's California now, and I feel, this time she will not come back.

Both of us watching this boring movie, neither one really interested. She wondering the best time to walk out the door, and I wondering when she would do it, waiting. Maybe it was my pride that said, "You'll have to go soon." My words broke up my comfortable position sitting against her legs. She sat in the chair like a god, until the words brought redness and gushing tears down her face. The tears streaking down like the long strains of her hippish long hair. The sight of this, from a god, almost made me laugh; but I loved her. She had not prepared as well as I. Hard to believe only a year's relationship could cause such a breakdown in emotions, in such an egotistical god.

In pride, she grabbed her finishing things, in the bathroom, as I waited for one last closeness of an embrace. At least all the important words had been said the month before. I held on long, as she covered me with her long warm arms, I knowing that there would be a time that I would wish I'd held her longer. I guess she was still crying as she walked out the door; I was still experiencing the loss of her warmth.

I watched the blue Volkswagen go with that damned scrawny, little bike roped loosely on the back, but I loved that bike. It was the last thing that went out of sight. I was now alone, completely alone.

Just me and the sleeping pills. Was it a game, to tell the world of my hurt and loneliness; or were they the loss of pain forever? Then there was the couch with the alarm clock, the symbol of awakening tomorrow.

Maybe the amount I drank caused the bad dreams; for I was relieved by the streak of light breaking through the shaded windows. The surprise of sleeping in my clothes was not as surprising as the realization of my decision to accept the pain. I would have preferred the bad dreams a little longer.

I put the cap back on the capsules of pills and made coffee. The coffee was so hot and very tasteless, yet it sent hot waves down my system as the acuteness of the awakening morning.

The sun was hot as the coffee, the day was bright as the pain of loneliness. Yet I guess I had prepared well enough. She's gone.

Strange about suicide, it's not a one time thing. You think about it all the time.

The therapists can tell you so many times about how important you are and how life can still be without her; seeing you every day, searching for the words that might spell out "Tonight is the night you will try it again." But no one has control over such a personal decision. One week and my counselor talks and watches me stare out the window. I wonder if she knows it will be tonight?

I guess she saw in between my words, for as soon as I reached home she called; Damned timing. The knife so close, I could have done it, if the phone hadn't rung.

"How are you feeling?" she asked. "Fine," I said, "Why did you call? . . . Leave me alone." My mistake was hanging up on her. It must have been only three minutes before two local cruisers pulled up to the house and then the loud banging on the door, like the pounding on a tomb door. I could escape out the back door, with the knife but I probably wouldn't get very far.

"Do you mind if we come in for a while?" said the policeman. He reminded me of someone's father, such a soft sympathetic tone. "We have a report — we have to check it out. You wouldn't be thinking of doing yourself in?"

From my home to the counseling center, in a cruiser, I am sure my neighbors thought I had been finally raided.

The officer reported the knife on the table to the counselor and it was talking to two or three psychiatrists before they allowed me to go home. Can you imagine! They believed me as I told them I'd decided not to go through with it?

I didn't go to school or work the next day. I rested and thought. The damned pounding of the door again, oh, it's the mail. All bills, except one with a return address: small letters writing out San Francisco, California.

My God, is it possible? I almost didn't get to read this.

Four pages long. ". . . miss you. . . my heart's still with you. . ." Is this, my God, needing me?

Two weeks passed before I returned her letter. I wrote of how sure I was she'd overcome the problems, of getting a job there and the strength to get herself together and how much I loved her. What more could be said without being selfish?

Maybe it was the movie that was on television that night that kept me from searching out needed friends.

Yet the movie was such a drag, what ever prompted me to stay home and watch it? Even the Volkswagens that go by were attracting more of my attention. Especially one, it seemed to be parking right beside my house. I was not going to be tempted to look out that God damned window again, when I know she's in California. Yet the slamming of the car door is so close.

Who do I know, though, other than Barbara, who has a Volkswagen, and would pound on my door? Well, it's not her. It can't be.

The adrenalin in my system was fighting to the top of my head, as I viewed Barbara standing there, waiting for a reaction to her presence.

We just held each other, it seemed, forever.

The night breezed by so quickly as I listened to her hard times in California. At the club the people warmed her welcome even more. I fought off the uncontrollable anger to hear that she had waited five days before seeing me, she had been with her parents.

Both Barbara and I viewed our ex-love as ending. "Any regrets about choosing me?" said Barbara. "What do you mean?" I asked. "Well, I figured we'd date for a few months then set up house-keeping together." "Wait a minute!" I said. "How do you feel about me?" "Oh, didn't I tell you?" said Barbara, "I am in love with you."

She gave me the feeling that it first slipped her mind to tell me.

Sunday the sun was as warm as the woman holding me, as if she was going to be sure that I would not leave her. This moment meant so much to us, but probably meaning little to the busy seaport town of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, New England, the Earth, the Solar System, the Universe.



Photo by Bob Paul

AND MY WIFE THINKS SHE'S SMART

by Fred Sheldon

A leopard once lived in content and plenty; food and water were easy to come by for his wife and children. Nearby lived his neighbor and friend, the fox. The fox felt in his heart that his life was safe only as long as the leopard could catch other prey, and he planned out a method for ridding himself of this dangerous friendship.

The fox thought that if he could get the leopard out of the way he would be able to live his life unafraid of being a meal for the leopard. In his mind, the fox thought, "do unto others before they do unto you."

One day the fox went to the leopard, and told him of a spot he had seen, a spot of gardens and lillies, where fawns and does disported and everything was fair. The leopard went with him to see this paradise, and afterwards rejoiced with great joy.

"Ah," thought the fox, "many a smile ends in a tear."

But the leopard was charmed, and wished to move to this beautiful spot right away but he told the fox that he must consult with his wife. The fox was sad because he knew the wisdom and the craft of the leopard's wife.

The fox begged the leopard, "Please, don't trust your wife. A woman's counsel is evil and foolish; her heart is hard like marble; she is a plague in the house! Yes, ask her advice and do the opposite."

The leopard went home and told his wife what he wanted to do.

"Beware of the fox!" she exclaimed. "There is one small animal that is the craftiest of all and he is called the fox. Haven't you heard how the fox bound the lion and killed him with cunning?"

The leopard, not having heard the story, listened to his wife relate it.

The lion loved the fox, but the fox had no faith in him, and plotted his death. One day the fox went to the lion complaining of a pain that had attacked him in the head. The fox told the lion that he had heard that a remedy would be tied up from head to foot and the pain would go away. The lion assented, and bound up the fox with some rope.

After five minutes the fox said that the pain had left him and he felt good. Then the lion cut the ropes. Both left with great knowledge. Time passed and the lion's turn came to suffer with a headache. In great distress he went to the fox and exclaimed, "Bind me up, brother, that I, too, may be healed as you were from the pain in the head!"

Quickly, the fox got the rope and bound up the lion

securely. Then the fox got the biggest rock available and crushed the lion to death.

"Therefore, my dear leopard," concluded his wife, "trust not the fox, for I fear him and his ideas. If this new place is so great, why hasn't he gone there to live?"

The leopard would not listen to his wife's advice, but went to see the fox with some uncertainties. He told the fox of his wife's feeling and the fox quickly replied, "Ah, I'm afraid that your fate will be the same as the woodcutter's; let me tell you his story and then you judge how silly your wife's ideas are."

Quickly, before the leopard had time to think about his wife's story, the fox jumped into his.

There once was this woodcutter living many miles from here, who was cutting logs as his wife sat by his side.

"My departed father," she said, "was a better workman than you. He could chop with both hands: when the right hand was tired, he used the left."

"Impossible!" said the woodcutter, "no woodsman does that. If he is right-handed, then he uses his right, and if he is left-handed, then he uses his left."

"Ah, my dear," she entreated, "try and do it as my father did."

The witless wonder raised his left hand to chop the wood, but struck his right-hand thumb instead. Without a word he took the axe smote his wife on the head, and she died.

What he did quickly traveled throughout the town and he was seized and stoned for his crimes.

"Therefore," continued the fox, "I tell you that all women are deceivers and that they trap a man's soul."

The leopard started for home, not knowing which person to listen to. His friend, the fox, had never done him harm, but many times his wife had annoyed him. He finally made the choice.

Angrily, he addressed his wife: "Come, get up and follow me, or I will kill you where you sit!"

Together they went with their young ones, the fox was their guide, they reached the beautiful promised place, and encamped by the waters. The fox bade them farewell, his head laughing at his tail.

A week passed, when finally the rains descended, and in the deep of the night the river rose and engulfed the leopard's family in their beds.

"Woe is me," sighed the leopard, "that I did not listen to my wife!"

And he died before his time.

THE WORLD IS FULL OF THEM

by Frank Jones

It had been a day of learning by fourth grade standards. I added two new words to my vocabulary.

The first was given to me by Karl Lentz, the best friend of my best friend. Karl yelled at me during the morning recess:

"You're a bastard! A bastard!! You hear me?! YOU ARE A BASTARD!! My father says so."

A faithful Sunday-school student (of Methodist leanings) I had the assurance that his taunts would not harm me. I ignored his screams and went back to my classroom.

Later that day, at home, I realted the incident to my mother for clarification. That was when I learned the second word. I was "adopted."



Somewhere along my 7th or 8th year of formal education I confiscated a forbidden book of "blue" jokes. In it was a 7-line poem I copied onto a small piece of paper, stuffed into a secret compartment in my wallet and kept with me for the next 15 years.



Don't you weep, my little baby
'cause you haven't got a dad
Go to sleep, my little baby
Things aren't really quite so bad
There's no reason any longer
Why you ought to feel so blue
The world is full of bastards just like you.

For the "high school years" adolescence and rebellion go hand in hand. I made a grip that turned my knuckles white. I rebelled against authority ("Don't talk back to me, young man!")

against school ("Ten afternoons for unwarranted absenteeism")

against parent ("You're not MY mother! I know it!")

against my fellow students ("Go to 'Pep Rallies' — YOU juveniles!")

against church (Even Christ had parents)

and against myself (I like being alone).



But there are those whose missionary zeal insists upon counsellors and interviews.

A sterile office with sanitized furniture. A shuffle of feet. A shuffle of papers. A glance.

"You're Jones?"

"Yeah."

"Sit down."

Hollow aluminum scrapes on plastic tiles. A shuffle of papers.

"Your father died at an early age, I believe."

"My *adopted* father. Yes."

"That's right. So it is just you and your adopted mother living together. Correct?"

"Yeah."

"No step-brothers or step-sisters?"

"No."



There were two. Female forms who were married and spent their lives being pregnant. Their husbands accepted the roles of "Uncle."

Two "Uncles." One gave me quarters for doing nothing and taught me contempt for women.

The other wrestled me to the floor, twisted my arm and growled: "There! Now I've got ya! Ya little bastard."



Join the Navy and see New Jersey.

I did more than join; I became. I accepted the rituals and rules of the pseudo-man-ego-games with a religious fervor. I swore, drank and whored along with the rest of the thirteen-button-diapered babies pretending they were men.

I stood in bus and train terminals and watched as the uniform's pinstriping flashed its slim beacons out to the pimps, the whores, the hustlers, the loan sharks, the gamblers, the gays, and the dykes with their butches and puffs — all the prisoners of solitary — as they flocked to the woolen blues as maggots do to dead meat. They whimpered, grunted, and whispered obscenities; they positioned, pleaded, and cried their loneliness. They demanded money, booze, and sex for proof of their existence. I gave. It was proof of mine.

Then I transgressed. I dared to think. I contemplated. I evaluated. I rejected this demented society led by congress-approved admirals. I transferred my thoughts to spoken words.

I was alone again.



"Hey Jones! Want to get laid?"

"No thanks. The Navy screws me enough as it is."

"Gees. You're a queer bastard."

"I am not."

"You're not what?"

"I'm not queer."



Release from prison, be it mental or physical, can be overwhelming. I took my soiled discharge and exchanged it for a car, a friend and several hundred six packs of beer.

I rolled down the window and the black void of silent words came wafting into the car. I threw the bottle out; it landed with a thud in wet autumn leaves and rolled away with the closing of the window. I opened another bottle.

"Hey, Bob," I slurred, "wanna hear a name?"

I received a grunt for an answer.

"Walter Lilson." I enunciated very distinctly.

"Walter. . . what?"

"Lilson. L-I-L-S-O-N."

"Who. ." a burp, "name that?"

"Mine."

"Yours? Man! You are wiped out. You are. . ."

"Uh-uh. That's my *adopted* name. Lilson is my *REAL* name."

"How did you find that out?"

"Just did."

She would be gone for two hours. Plenty of time. The creaking of unused hinges pierced the quiet. The smell of moth balls and trapped memories leaped from the chest. Faded photographs, locks of hair. In the corner, a folded piece of paper glowed. Unfolded it read: "The State of Connecticut hereby authorizes. . ." All names and dates from the adoption certificate etched themselves into my mind. With it — the taste of the smell repressed time.



Two guys. One car. Several six-packs. A trip to New York.

"Wanna stop in Connecticut, Frank?"

"I don't care."

"We can go through Bristol."

"So."

"Weren't you born there?"

"Yeah."

"Well. Wanna go and see it?"

"I don't care."



It's town hall is small. The offices of Clerk of Records is smaller.

"May I help you?"

"Yes. I would like a copy of my birth certificate."

"Name."

"Well. . . I think it's listed as Lilson but it might be under. . ."

"Excuse me. Are you adopted?"

"Why, yes. Yes, I am."

"Well, I'm sorry but state law forbids the dissemination of any information to adoptees on their heritage or their. . ."

I reached over and grabbed her by the throat, then I grabbed those standardized forms, the notary stamps, the boxes of paper clips and began shoving them down her throat, one by one. She gagged at first, but then swallowed the items. From her rectum came bursting, smiling couples holding hands: Danny Thomas and Jean Hagen, Ozzie and Harriet Nelson, Robert Young and Jane Wyatt, but in the end it was Lassie and Cloris Leachman devouring the body of Jon Provost.

"I see," I said thoughtfully, "well, it really doesn't matter. I just thought I'd stop in while I was in town. I really don't care."

Spring is a violent time of year, particularly from the confines of a hospital waiting room.

"You may go in now, Mr. Jones."

I walked into the antiseptic-versus-death smelling room and saw him propped in a chair by the single window. Wasted, gaunt, he was spaghetti with a face. Intravenous tubes ran from his arms; a white plastic tube hung listlessly from a nostril; tubes ran from his kidneys to a bag on the side that was discretely covered with linen; tubes from a plasma bottle on a chromium tree hovered anxiously, unconnected.

His eyes searched mine for a hint of recognition.

I identified myself. I explained how I found his name. How I knew that he was once married to my mother — my "real" mother. He scratched at the various tubes and stared out the window.

"Are you my father?"

"No."

Then the apologies, the explications. Expressions of a dead generation from a dying man. "See, Frank. . . those were hard times, then. Hard times. Your mother and I had stopped living together for quite awhile, in fact I didn't have. . . er. . . uh. . ."

"Relations?" I offered.

"Yes," he accepted the word with guilt. "I didn't. . . well, for almost two years. Those were hard times then." He paused, stared out the window, then continued. "Well, your mother. . . she was. . . well what we called "wild" in those days. . . and she became. . . uh. . ."

"Pregnant?"

"Yes." He stared out the window and droned on. "Those were hard times then. And we thought that since the divorce wasn't settled, I would put my name on the birth certificate and that way. . ."

I leaped from my chair and yanked all his tubes from his body then coiled them around his neck, and while his veined hands clawed at the air, I squeezed until his eyes grew and grew, finally replaced by scab-covered testes. He melted into a puddle of sperm.

"Those were hard times then, you know."

"Yeah. I know." And I left.

Three days later, the cancer that had started devouring his body years ago finished their meal.

The name once engraved on a piece of legal stationery now appeared in newsprint. Her daughter was my mother. I attempted to shake the tightness from my body. I couldn't. I walked into the funeral home.

The mixture of aromas. Flowers and formaldehyde. A sudden hush from a small cluster of people in a far corner. Without looking at the casket I walked past it and over to the opposite corner facing the group. I stood rigid, hands at my sides. I bore their inspection. Then she broke from the group. A puzzled look crossed her face as she walked towards me.

It was her. Before she uttered her name or proffered her hand. Before, I knew. I knew it was my mother. But I didn't know. My eyes raced with computer speed. They searched her, stripped her, analyzed. They stared at her walk, her swinging elbows, her hazel eyes, her wrinkles, her dyed hair, her pierced ear lobes, her calves, her toe-nails.

I took her velvet-gloved hand as she asked, "Do I know you?" The voice was feminine, soft, curious.

I stiffened my arm and then flung her against the wall behind me. Whirling about and facing her, I screamed. "Do you KNOW ME?!? Mother-whore! Whore-mother! Scow! How many times have you emptied that foul-smelling vagina?!? How many times has it been filled?"

"No," I replied softly. I released her hand but not her eyes. "I'm afraid not. I used to do a few errands for Agnes."

I gestured towards the casket.

Leaping atop the open casket, I gestured violently and her stomach began to swell. I jumped down and stared at my mother's face become transfixed with horror.

"Oh, I'm sorry I hadn't met you before. So few people visited mother in the last few years."

The stomach swelled to its limit and then with a violent spasm a sailor-suited fetus was expelled onto the carpeted floor. It crawled towards my mother.

"Yes, yes. Well, I did what I could for Agnes, and I just thought I'd stop in and pay my last respects. I'm sorry I can't stay longer. . ."

The fetus crept up her leg and begged entrance to her uterus. She shook her leg frantically, her breasts fell off.

"Well, it was nice meeting you, are you sure I don't know you?"

"Yes, I'm sure."

I watched as she shook the fetus to the floor and then kicked it out the door where it bounced into the street. I went over and closed the door behind me.



I stood outside the funeral home. A knot in my shoulder created a tenseness in my entire body. My stomach churned. I mentally re-read the obituary notice. "Agnes Serralfing. Coronary thrombosis. Age 76. Surviving Mrs. Serralfing are a daughter. . ."

I stepped down slowly leaving the swaddling-shrouds behind me. "Do I know you?" she had asked. I chuckled. I was just going to ask myself the same question.

